

USAID Education and Training: 400,000 Steps Along the Bridge

Since USAID was founded four decades ago, it has educated and trained 400,000 citizens of developing countries, some of them ending up as presidents, prime ministers, judges, mayors, doctors, entrepreneurs, academics, NGO leaders, and agricultural researchers.

Education and training are vital steps along a bridge that leads toward economic growth and peace, giving poor countries expertise and sharing Western ideals while making good friends for the United States.

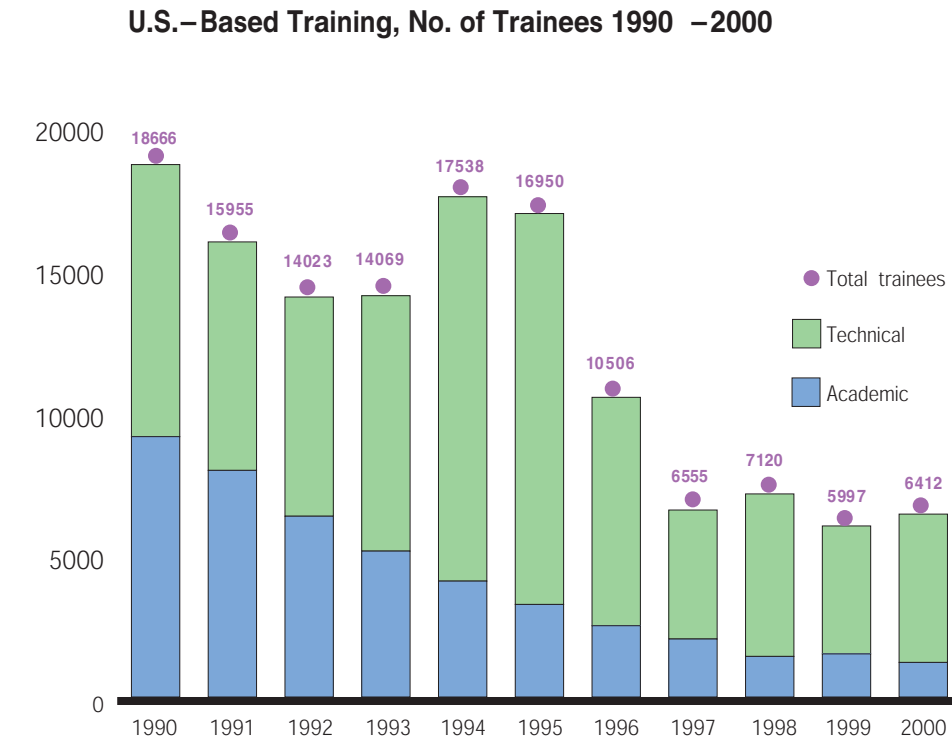
The vast majority of the 400,000, who took short courses or degree programs, have returned home to their jobs and contributed to their countries' development.

Education remains a U.S. foreign aid priority in the fight to reduce poverty, to counter anti-Western movements, to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, and to replace professionals dying in the AIDS pandemic.

For example, a dozen Palestinians recently gathered in Washington at the offices of the Academy for Educational Development, a USAID contractor, to celebrate their impending graduation from master's degree programs in management and other fields at several universities around the United States.

Armed with their new degrees, the students are poised to play vital roles in developing the new Palestinian state expected to be established once the region is at peace.

In the mid 1980s, the heyday of USAID's education programs in the United States, about 10,000 visiting students attended academic programs in colleges and universi-



ties, and another 10,000 attended short-term technical training courses on topics ranging from management to agriculture to manufacturing to health.

The Agency's recent emphasis on short-term results has pushed missions to cut long-term academic training. From a high of nearly 20,000 participants, roughly 50 percent academic, trained yearly in the United States in the 1980s, the number has now fallen to

less than 7,000, about 8 percent academic.

This decline was greatly exacerbated by cuts in the foreign aid budget and the closing of USAID missions. Also, tough new visa policies since the September 11 attacks make it harder for students from many developing countries to enter the United States.

While fewer now come to the United States, USAID has also helped half a million people each year receive education or

training in their own countries—often from American teachers and trainers sent abroad—or in third countries at universities or centers such as the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines.

Agency policymakers reasoned that many of the people already trained were capable of teaching others in their home countries at far lower expense than in the United States, where educational costs have skyrocketed and universities are increasingly unwilling to grant foreign students in-state tuition rates.

Many in USAID and its partner organizations are growing alarmed at the trend to reduce study opportunities in the United States, and there is strong interest in increasing the number of academic programs.

"This Agency has eviscerated its training programs that are one of the most valuable tools for development," said USAID education expert Diane Leach.

Education in the United States was once seen as part of the Cold War support for democracy and the collapse of the Soviet block reduced its importance. However, it is again seen as vital in fighting terrorism.

"Now as much as ever, education and training in the United States further our interests," said Ethel Brooks, an education specialist at USAID. "It builds alliances and partnerships for greater sustainability. There is concern that as the cohort of USAID-sponsored participants trained in the United States in the peak years retires, the U.S. will lose development allies." ★

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